

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 01896 101209Z

43

ACTION SS-30

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O R 100950Z SEP 74

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1402

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USUN NEW YORK 62

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1896

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US

SUBJ: FIRST MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD

1. SUMMARY: PRESENTED CREDENTIALS SEPTEMBER 9 AND RECEIVED WARM WELCOME FROM ASAD. COMMENTING THAT ISRAEL CURRENTLY ISSUING NUMBER OF STATEMENTS FALSELY ALLEGING SYRIAN NON-OBSERVANCE OF DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT, PRESIDENT SAID HE ASSUMED THESE STATEMENT PRINCIPALLY DIRECTED AT INFLUENCING U.S. AUDIENCE. ASAD CONSIDERS, HOWEVER, CLIMATE OF U.S. PUBLIC OPINION NOW MORE FAVORABLE TO ARAB CAUSE AND HOPES FOR CLOSER US-SYRIAN BILATERAL TIES.

2. FOLLOWING MY PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS AT NOON, SEPTEMBER 9, I MET WITH ASAD AND FONMIN KHADDAM FOR PRIVATE DISCUSSION WHICH RAN A HALF HOUR OVER THE SCHEDULED FIFTEEN MINUTES. CEREMONY AND SEPARATE MEETING WERE CONDUCTED ENTIRELY IN ARABIC TO ASAD'S EVIDENT PLEASURE. ATMOSPHERE OF MEETING WAS EXTREMELY WARM AND PRESIDENT WAS RELAXED THROUGHOUT. HE OPENED BY APOLOGIZING FOR DELAY IN RECEIVING ME OCCASIONED BY HIS SIX DAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO ROMANIA. HE THEN ASKED THAT I CONVEY HIS PERSONAL REGARDS TO SECRETARY KISSINGER FRO WHOM HE ENTERTAINS THE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 01896 101209Z

HIGHEST RESPECT AND WHOM HE LOOKS FORWARD TO SEEING SOON AGAIN

IN DAMASCUS. HE ALSO MADE SPECIAL POINT OF EXTENDING HIS WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS TO PRESIDENT FORD AND WISHED HIM EVERY SUCCESS. I SAID THAT I BROUGHT THE PRESIDENT'S AND SECRETARY'S BEST WISHES TO HIM. PRESIDENT THEN INVITED DCM SCOTES TO JOIN US AND PRAISED SCOTES' ENERGY AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN LEADING THE U.S. OFFICE HERE SINCE LAST JANUARY. ASAD COMMENTED IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT OUR EMBASSY WAS NOT YET UP TO STRENGTH. I SAID HE WAS RIGHT; THE SIX OFFICERS I HAD JUST PRESENTED TO HIM WERE ALL WHO HAD ARRIVED. WHILE WE WOULD HAVE SOME ADDITIONS IN THE COMING MONTHS, I SAID WE WERE NOT LIKE THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN DAMASCUS WHOSE SIX COUNCELORS OF EMBASSY AND 11 FIRST SECRETARIES WOULD MORE THAN FILL THE ROOM IN WHICH WE WERE MEETING. ASAD LAUGHED AND SAID HE WAS SURE THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR WOULD BE HAPPY TO LEND US TWO OR THREE OF HIS STAFF.

3. THE PRESIDENT THEN COMMENTED THAT OUR SEVEN YEAR ABSENCE FROM SYRIA HAD BEEN TOO LONG, ALTHOUGH IT PERHAPS HAD GIVEN EACH SIDE A BETTER APPRECIATION OF THE OTHER'S VALUE. HE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO GROWTH IN THE VARIETY AND QUALITY OF OUR BILATERAL TIES. WHEN I NOTED THAT THE SECRETARY PLANNED TO DISCUSS THESE TIES IN SOME DETAIL WHEN HE MET NEXT WITH KHADDAM IN NEW YORK LATER THIS MONTH, THE PRESIDENT IMMEDIATELY DIRECTED KHADDAM TO SET A MEETING WITH ME DEVOTED TO SUCH A DISCUSSION FOR THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 10. I SAID THIS WOULD HELP ME ADVISE WASHINGTON MORE PRECISELY OF SYRIAN INTERESTS AND EXPECTATIONS.

4. ASAD SAID HE FELT THAT UNITED STATES PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL OPINION HAD BECOME MUCH MORE FAVORABLE TOWARDS THE ARAB CAUSE SINCE THE OCTOBER WAR. I REPLIED THAT EVER SINCE 1967 THERE HAD BEEN A STEADY CHANGE IN AMERICAN APPRECIATION OF NEAR EASTERN COMPLEXITIES. ASAD PAID HIGH TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT NIXON'S ROLE IN THE RESTORATION OF US-SYRIAN RELATIONS. HE REGRETTEED THAT EVENTS HAD COMPELLED THE FORMER PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION BUT FULLY REALIZED THAT THE RESIGNATION HAD BEEN CAUSED BY DOMESTIC REASONS AND NOT BY RESISTANCE TO NIXON'S FOREIGN POLICY. KHADDAM INTERJECTED HOW PRESIDENT FORD HAD IMPRESSED HIM IN WASHINGTON LAST

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 01896 101209Z

MONTH BY HIS FIRM REASSERTION OF CONTINUITY IN AMERICA'S NEAR EAST POLICY. ASAD SAID HE HOPED THAT MORE US POLITICAL FIGURES WOULD VISIT SYRIA. I RECALLED THAT KHADDAM HAD EXTENDED SUCH INVITATIONS WHEN HE WAS IN WASHINGTON TO SENATORS HUMPHREY AND JAVITS. ASAD NOTED THAT SHOULD SENATOR JACKSON COME TO SYRIA HE, TOO, WOULD BE WELCOMED. SYRIANS WERE CONFIDENT THAT "AMERICANS WHO VISIT US REALIZE WE ARE NOT WHAT OTHERS SAY WE ARE."

5. PRESIDENT THEN COMMENTED THAT ISRAELI SPOKESMEN HAD RECENTLY ISSUED A NUMBER OF FALSE STATEMENTS ABOUT SYRIA, ALLEGING SYRIAN VIOLATIONS OF THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT. HE ASSUMED, HOWEVER, THAT MOST SUCH STATEMENTS WERE INTENDED FOR AMERICAN EARS AND TO INFLUENCE U.S. PUBLIC OPINION. HE WAS NOT INCLINED TO ANSWER THESE ALLEGATIONS PUBLICLY. I ASKED IF HE PLANNED ANY ANSWER TO THE ISRAELI STATEMENT ABOUT SYRIA'S UNWILLINGNESS TO RESETTLE KUNEITRA AND THE GOLAN VILLAGES. THE PRESIDENT IMMEDIATELY ASSERTED THAT TO THE BEST OF HIS KNOWLEDGE SYRIAN VILLAGERS HAD GONE BACK TO ALL HABITABLE GOLAN VILLAGES NOW UNDER SYRIAN CONTROL. THE TOWN OF KUNEITRA IS THE EXCEPTION BECAUSE IT WILL TAKE YEARS TO REPOPULATE. HE OBSERVED THAT "IT IS ONE THING TO BUILD HOUSES AND ANOTHER TO RESTORE LIFE TO A CITY." HE NOTED THAT A SYRIAN GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE HAD BEEN APPOINTED TO SUBMIT RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE RECONSTRUCTION AND RESETTLEMENT OF KUNEITRA BUT HAD NOT YET MADE ITS FINAL REPORT. UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES IT HAD NO ECONOMIC BASE, GIVEN THE LOSS OF ITS AGRICULTURAL FIELDS. THE PRESENCE OF ISRAELI FORCES ON THE NEARBY HILLS REPRESENTED AN ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON SYRIAN CIVILIANS WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE DECIDE TO RETURN AND BEGIN TO RECONSTRUCT THEIR LIVES IN KUNEITRA.

6. BEFORE TAKING MY LEAVE, I SAID I FORESAW A PROBABLE NEED IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS FOR READY ACCESS TO THE PRESIDENT AND ASKED WHAT CHANNEL HE WOULD PREFER I USE TO CONTACT HIM. HE STATED HE WISHED TO CONTINUE USING THE CHANNEL SET UP WITH SCOTES, I.E., CONTACTING HIM THROUGH DABOUL, HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY IN THE PRESIDENCY. HE (ASAD) STOOD READY TO MEET PERSONALLY WITH ME AT ANY TIME I FELT THE SUBJECT SO REQUIRED. ASAD CONCLUDED OUR MEETING REPEATING CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DAMASC 01896 101209Z

HIS PLEASURE AT THE REESTABLISHMENT OF FULL DIPLOMATIC TIES BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. HE ADDED QUIETLY, "I AM SURE THAT ISRAEL WILL TRY TO BLOCK THE AVENUES OF CONTACT BETWEEN US BUT WE IN TURN WILL SHOULDER ASIDE SUCH ATTEMPTS."

7. COMMENT: WARMTH OF PRESIDENT'S WELCOME REFLECTS THE CONFIDENCE HE HAS DEVELOPED IN U.S. EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF A JUST PEACE SOLUTION.  
MURPHY

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## Message Attributes

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**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 10 SEP 1974  
**DecapTION Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**DecapTION Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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